



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Dolphin Head

Consultation factsheet for candidate Highly Protected
Marine Area (HPMA)

Date: July 2022

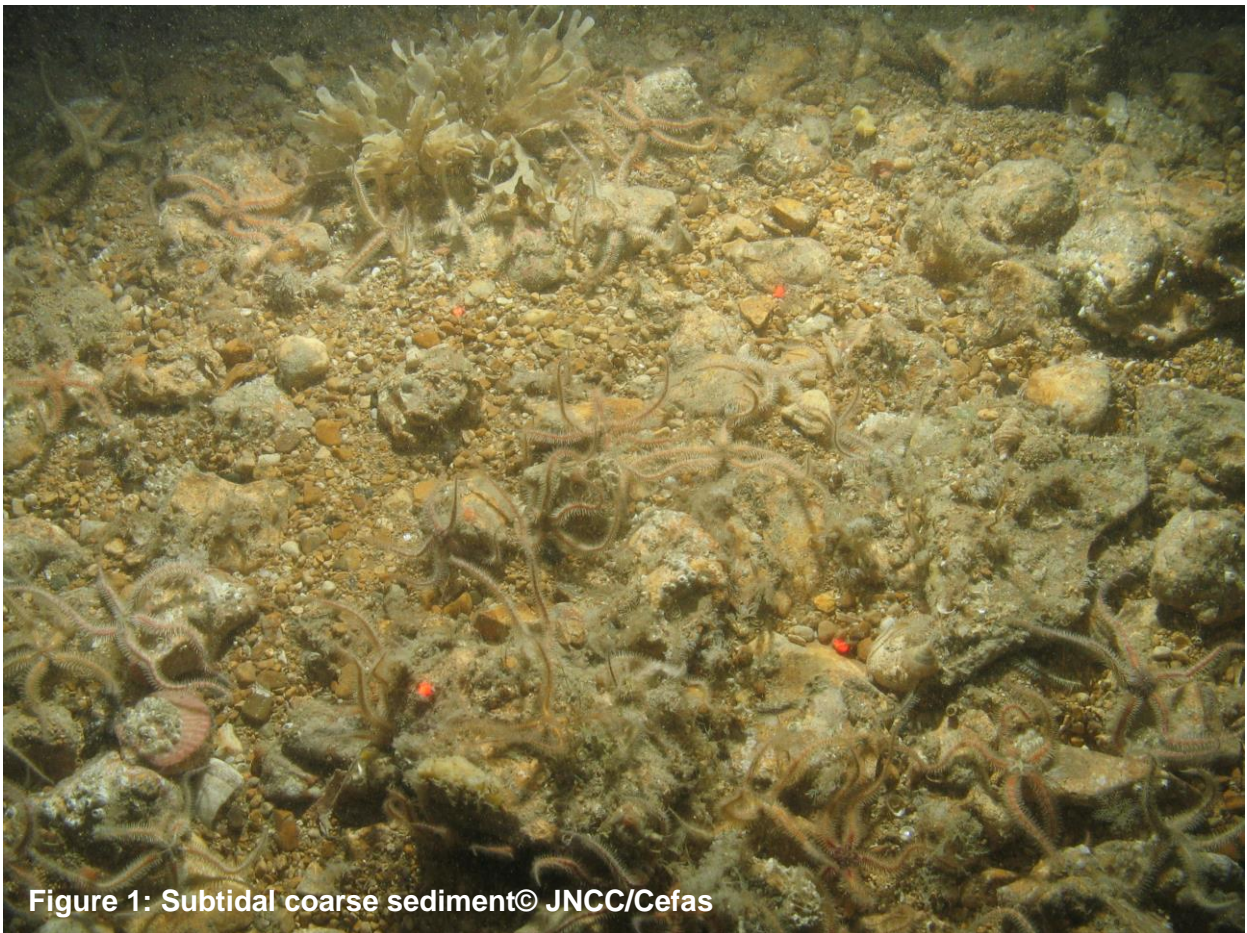


Figure 1: Subtidal coarse sediment© JNCC/Cefas

Introduction

This factsheet outlines why Dolphin Head has been identified as a candidate HPMA, providing an overview of the ecological importance, where this area is located and our current knowledge of the activities within the area. This factsheet may be updated with additional evidence after consultation if this area is designated.

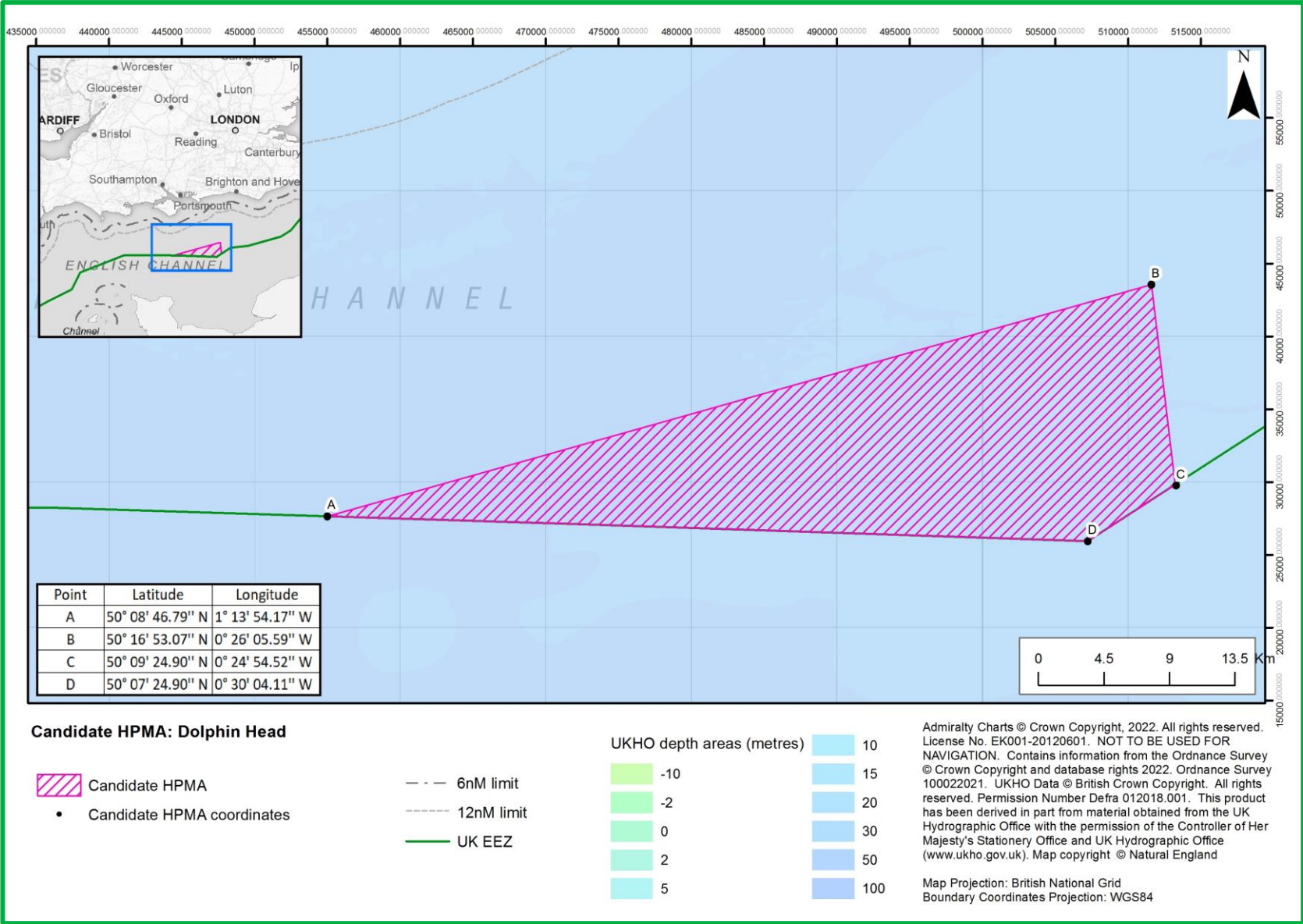
Where is the candidate HPMA located?

Dolphin Head is an offshore candidate HPMA situated beyond the 12nm territorial sea limit in the Eastern English Channel region, covering 508km². This area is approximately 55km south of Selsey Bill, West Sussex with depths across the area ranging from approximately 40m to 58m.

The map on the following page shows current boundary of the candidate HPMA.

This candidate location partly overlaps with the designated MPA Offshore Brighton Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ). A map showing this Marine Protected Area (MPA) in relation to the candidate HPMA can be found in Annex 1.

Dolphin Head candidate HPMA map



What habitats and species are found in this candidate HPMA?

Dolphin Head candidate HPMA is hugely diverse by comparison to other areas in the Eastern Channel. It attracts numerous seabirds (such as northern fulmar and black-legged kittiwake) and marine mammals (such as Risso's dolphin and harbour porpoise), with a number of regionally threatened fish species such as undulate ray also recorded here.

The seabed in this area contains animal dominated rocky reef as well as coarse and mixed sediment habitats. Areas of ross worm reef occur on mixed sediment within this area. These small tube-building worms build reefs which help to stabilise cobble, pebble and gravel habitats. This structural complexity enhances the biodiversity and

abundance of benthic species present in this area. Ross worm reef habitats in this area are significant for nature conservation, due to their habitat building characteristics, however this type of habitat is particularly affected by dredging or trawling and in heavily dredged or disturbed areas an impoverished community may be left.

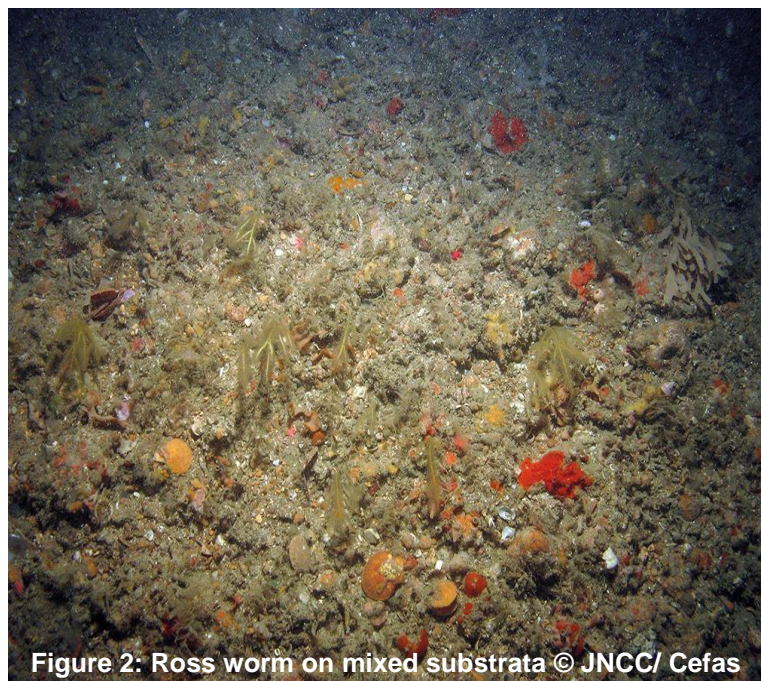


Figure 2: Ross worm on mixed substrata © JNCC/ Cefas

Why have we identified this as a candidate HPMA?

The Dolphin Head candidate HPMA has been identified for its regionally high biodiversity together with the range of important and threatened species and habitats and its relative importance for commercial species. This candidate area is thought to be in a relatively degraded state following the impacts of human activity, with the partially overlapping MCZ in unfavourable condition. However, the habitats in this area have a good recovery potential if these existing pressures are removed. Therefore, designating a pilot HPMA here presents an opportunity to fully recover habitats and species present across this area and within the overlapping MCZ, where additional restrictions on human activities might help progress towards meeting its conservation objectives. Protected features which exist both within the HPMA and existing MPA will be

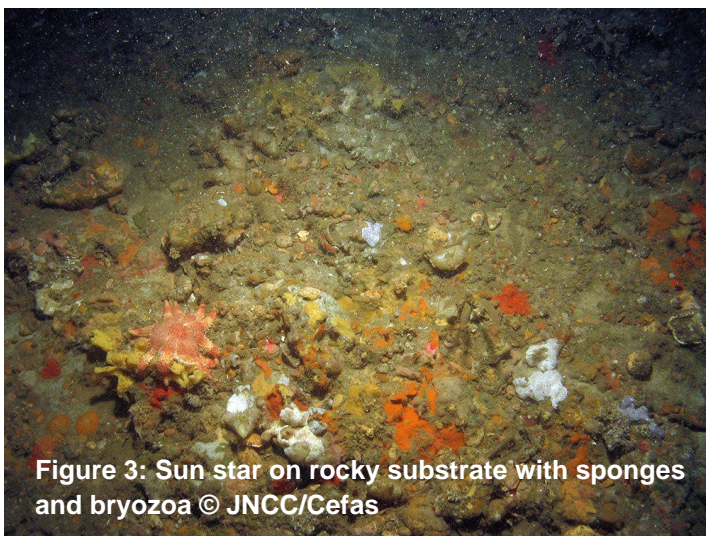


Figure 3: Sun star on rocky substrate with sponges and bryozoa © JNCC/Cefas

subject to the higher conservation objective proposed for HPMA's in the overlapping area.

The Eastern Channel region is known as a popular area for both recreational and commercial fishing. The designation of Dolphin Head would help protect the

feeding and nursery grounds of many highly important commercial fish species, such as cod, herring, and plaice, as well as ecologically important species. In particular, the thornback ray has seen major declines in abundance and geographical range due to overfishing due to its vulnerability to exploitation. Protection of this species' habitat through this designation would present an opportunity to support species recovery.

Taking a whole site approach to protection

HPMAs will take a ‘whole site approach’, therefore the whole marine ecosystem within the HPMA boundary will be designated for protection. The proposed protected feature description for pilot HPMAs as will be listed in the designation order is:

‘The marine ecosystem, habitats and species of flora and fauna, abiotic elements, and their supporting ecosystem function and processes, including the seabed, water column and sea surface, within the site boundary.’

The features this candidate site would protect include the types of species and habitats that have been recorded in Dolphin Head candidate HPMA which are listed below. However, this is not an exhaustive list.

This candidate HPMA contains a range of broadscale habitats including blue carbon habitats, together with their associated communities. Features include:

- Atlantic and Mediterranean high energy circalittoral rock
- Sublittoral coarse sediment
- Sublittoral mixed sediment

As well as these habitats, a range of species, including birds, marine mammals and multiple species of fish and shellfish are also likely to use this area.

Further details on the specific habitats and species recorded in this candidate HPMA can be found in the ecological narrative located in Annex H.

Conservation objectives

A designation order covering a HPMA will set out the protected features and the conservation objectives applicable within the HPMA site boundary. The proposed conservation objective for all pilot HPMAs, including Dolphin Head is:

“To achieve full natural recovery of the structure and functions, features, qualities and composition of characteristic biological communities present within HPMAs and prevent further degradation and damage to the marine ecosystem subject to natural change.”

Which activities are likely to be affected?

Pilot HPMAAs will prohibit extractive, destructive, and depositional uses, allowing only non-damaging levels of other activities. Our current understanding about the sectors and activities which are thought to be taking place in the candidate HPMA is based on the best available evidence at the time and therefore may not present a comprehensive view of all activities taking place in this area. We are gathering additional evidence through the consultation to better understand activities in the area and potential impacts of HPMA pilot designation on these and other activities. Specific information gaps have been identified in the Impact Assessment together with additional information on the activities set out below.

Commercial fishing

UK vessels

Our evidence, based on Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) and sightings data, suggests that the following gears are used within the site:

- Scottish seines
- Pair trawls (midwater)

VMS data suggests an annual average of seven UK vessels, greater than 12m in length, used this area between 2017 and 2019, harvesting horse mackerel, Jack mackerels, Atlantic mackerel and surmullet landing mainly at Portsmouth, Boulogne (France), Scheveningen (Netherlands) and Le Havre (France).

Based on sightings data we have no evidence of vessels under 12m in length using this area.

Non-UK vessels

Just over twice the number non-UK vessels (113), greater than 12m in length, compared to UK vessels (53) were sighted in this area, based on VMS data from between 2016 and 2020. This effort was

mostly from French vessels and to a lesser degree from Dutch, Irish, Belgian and German vessels.

Displacement of commercial fishing

Dredging for king scallop has previously been restricted, as such, the candidate HPMA could potentially add further future restrictions to this fleet segment. Due to existing restrictions within the Offshore Brighton MCZ as well as the presence of sub-sea cables, the displacement of the mobile fishing fleet in the adjacent area is limited. Potting could be displaced to the adjacent area if the density of the other fishing activity allows for it.

Recreational sea fishing

The offshore nature of the site means that only boat-based angling is possible here. There is no data on the sea angling activity within the site, although some charter boat fishing has been recorded within 20km of the site and there is anecdotal evidence of charter fishing targeting shark take place in the area.

Given the distance from the shore, it is very unlikely that there is a lot of activity by either private or charter boats.

Anchoring

We do not have any evidence of anchoring areas within the Dolphin Head candidate HPMA.

Activities which may be taking place at non-damaging levels

Management measures for activities that are not extractive, destructive and depositional, most likely non-licensable and/or recreational, will depend on existing activity in the site and the sensitivity of the species or habitat to activities taking place in that area. Examples of non-licensable activities that may threaten biodiversity include motorised recreation, wildlife watching and land-based recreation. Some of these activities currently occurring in the sites could be damaging to the species and habitats. This consultation will help us improve our evidence about activities occurring in the sites, which will help SNCBs to develop the conservation advice for the sites and enable any necessary management measures to be determined. Management may be voluntary. For example, some activities might benefit from voluntary codes of conduct such as diving (to encourage divers to avoid resting on the seabed, removing species or touching features), dog walking (to avoid disturbing species) or powerboating (to encourage users to reduce their speed).

Additional information

[Link to SNCB ecological advice](#)

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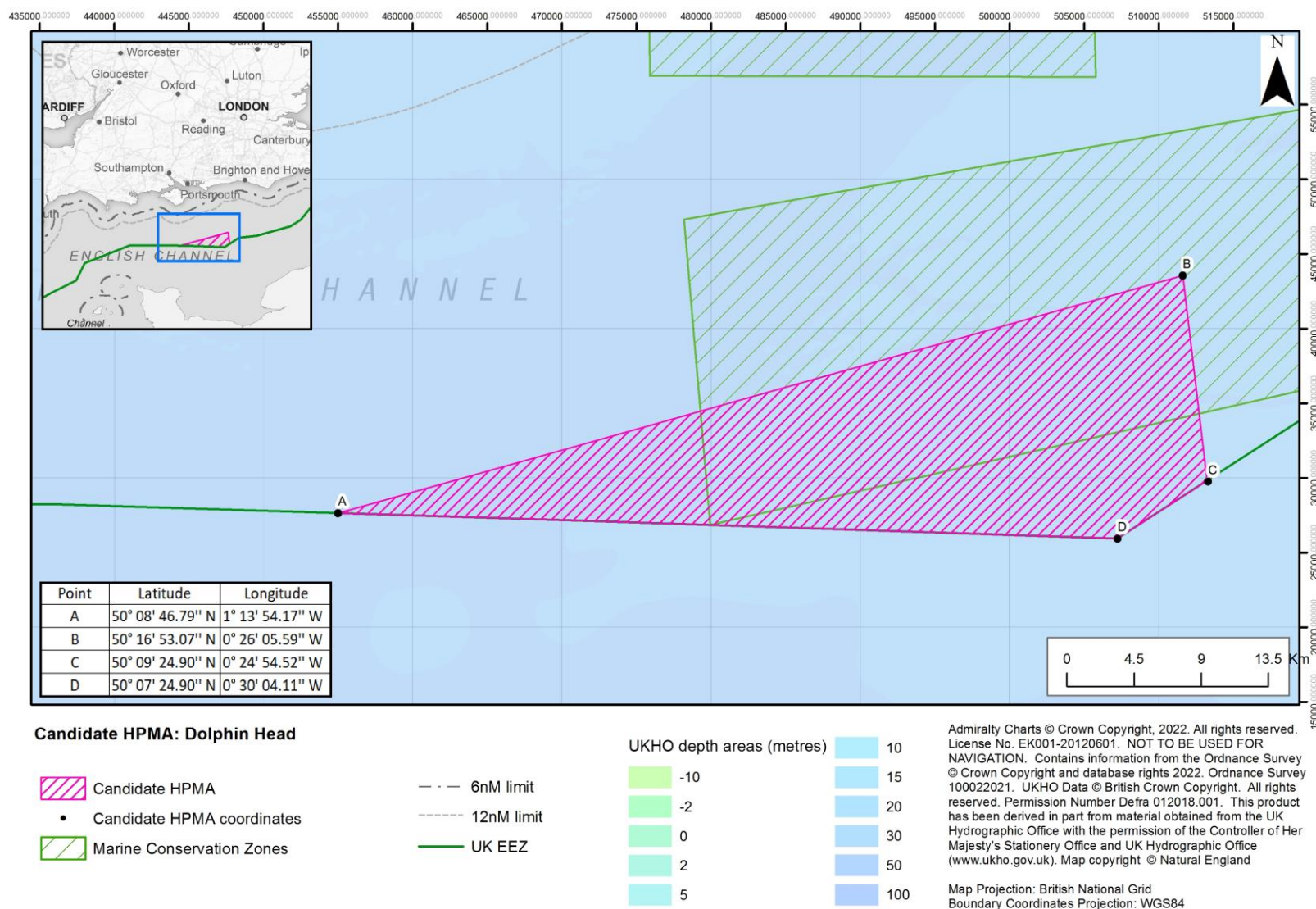
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Annex 1: Dolphin Head candidate HPMA map with existing MPAs



Annex 2: Designated features of overlapping MPAs

The MPAs which Dolphin Head candidate HPMA overlap with are designated for the following features:

Offshore Brighton Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ)

- High energy circalittoral rock
- Subtidal coarse sediment
- Subtidal mixed sediments